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Title : Behavior of Hawaiian Spinner Dolphins(*Stenella longirostris*) in Response to Vessels/Swimmers

Category : Behavior

Student : M.A./M.S.

Preferred Format : Either Oral or Poster Presentation

Abstract : The boom in tourism is a potential disturbance to spinners in Hawaii. Since each bay is unique, basing local regulations solely on past studies of Kealake'akua may not be appropriate. In order to expand our knowledge, we compared Kealake'akua with two previously unstudied bays, Honaunau and Ho'okena. Spinner activity was observed from land-based stations. Observers recorded information about vessel traffic every five minutes. Whenever enough dolphins surfaced to get a reading on activity state, dispersion, and number of animals, a reading was taken. All aerial activity was recorded as it occurred. Behavior categories were based on Norris et al, 1994. For most vessel types, the average number at any given five minute reading was higher on days with dolphins in all three bays. Spinners in Kealake'akua changed preferred resting locations since previous studies. This change in usage patterns over time may reflect responses to humans. Vessel/swimmer traffic also seemed to dictate the location of spinners in Honaunau. Spinners gave preference to an area over a deep hole that swimmers tended to avoid. Dolphin entry into Kealake'akua and Honaunau was usually not accompanied by aerial activity. Also, dolphins were quiet when leaving Kealake'akua, and arousal was difficult to pinpoint. This differs from previously described patterns. It is possible that dolphins may be quiet to avoid revealing their presence to people waiting to swim out and chase them. Spinners in Ho'okena showed the most reaction to vessels/swimmers, and on several occasions, dolphins were chased out of that bay. Changes in spinner behavior patterns may affect their ability to rest and to prepare for the evening hunt. We suggest a minimum approach distance of 50m be implemented in Kealake'akua and Ho'okena. We propose banning motorized vessel tours in Honaunau and Ho'okena. Attempting to approach or interact with spinners should be prohibited.